

THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF



KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA

The North Kensington Walk

KENSAL GREEN CEMETERY

In 1830 a group of public-spirited gentlemen met and set steps in motion which led to the formation of the General Cemetery Company. Various possible locations were carefully considered including Primrose Hill, before farmland was purchased between the Harrow Road and the canal to accommodate this thoughtful response to unhygienic and primitive conditions within the metropolis.

The Company's shares were soon taken up, and they obtained an Act of Parliament to assist with their endeavours. Their land was very quickly enclosed to form Kensal Green Cemetery (All Souls) so that the business of burying could get under way while a considered design for buildings and layout could be prepared. Continental examples were studied, (in particular Père-la-Chaise in Paris), learned debate ensued in the press and an architectural competition was promoted to find a dignified and uplifting design for the buildings and layout of the cemetery.

After squabbles and challenged decisions of the sort which so often bedevil architectural competitions a victor emerged, William Chadwick, who it is suggested was in effect developing in detail a design and style promoted more generally by Sir John Dean Paul, chairman of the Company. Be that as it may, the romantic and picturesque landscape concept of the design is responsible for the curving avenues and diverse planting which contributes so much to its character.

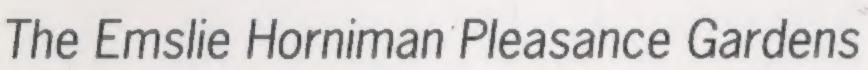
It seems to have been the case that many of the "great and good" were attracted to make use of the facilities of the new necropolis. The design intentions among other things encouraged the erection of tombs and memorials of artistic merit to complete the landscape and provide stimulus for reflection. Sculpture and all architectural styles were encouraged and in many instances the response was a design of vigour and gusto. Much of the nation's history is reflected by the often extensive and surprisingly legible inscriptions on these memorials.

The 'Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery' have published a select list of notable monuments which is obtainable from the Company's office at the entrance gateway. The former Dissenters' Chapel in the corner of the Cemetery where Ladbroke Grove crosses the canal is being restored as a visitors' centre, and a new pedestrian entrance is being made there.

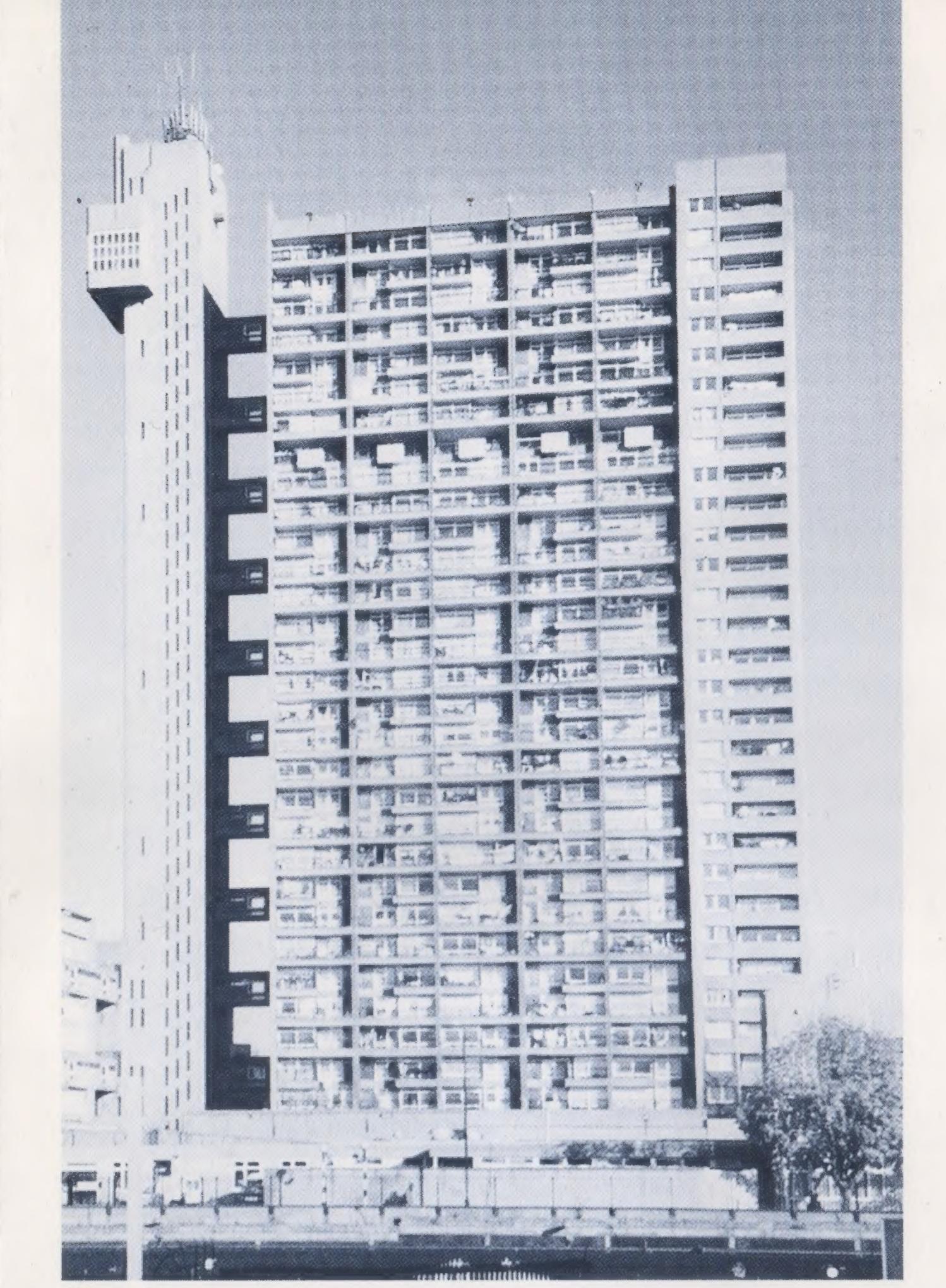
Trees and shrubs play a dominant role in establishing the character and appearance of the General Cemetery Company land. The London Ecology Unit has defined its nature conservation interest as being of metropolitan importance. This acknowledges its diversity, with woodland, scrub, tall herbs, vegetated monuments and grassland with scattered trees. The presence of the adjacent canal adds to its nature conservation importance, though is of limited significance to its character visually, when viewed from within.

The curving alignment of many of the avenues and the planting schemes which have been followed create a complex series of spaces. The botanical variety is nearly as great as that of the architectural styles of the monuments.

Over much of the area neglect and decay are taking their toll, albeit in visual terms the effect is in many ways attractive. The contrast with areas of more recent, and better maintained, formal garden design around the austerely elegant crematorium building of the 1930s enhances both.







Trellick Tower

There is easy access to the Canal towpath on each side of Ladbroke Grove when the new bridge over it is reached. Walking to the left one passes a new building beside the canal which accommodates a water sports centre and apartments. Later the atmosphere becomes surprisingly quiet after a canalside cafe is passed, with the robust Victorian wall of a former gas works on one side and the generally still waters disturbed mainly by fishermen and coots on the other, perhaps watched by a heron. Colourful narrow boats use a basin here, and some 800m further on a picnic spot on a point of high ground allows those with an interest in more modern transport to see over the Great Western Railway to the state-of-the-art North Pole Depot of the 'chunnel' trains. The deeply quiet vegetation on the other side of the canal screens most of the cemetery from view.

Walking on leads to steps up unto Scrubs Lane at Mitre Bridge (bus 220) but to explore North Kensal return towards Ladbroke Grove and under the new bridge. The ambience gets much more urban here and Harrow Road can be seen opposite beyond a narrow strip of garden. At Wedlake Street a gentle spiral leads up unto a footbridge over the canal to join it (bus 18).

After some recent brick-built canalside housing the tow-path comes to a wildlife garden created by the Meanwhile Gardens Community Association which also organises youth activities on the canal (0181 960 4600). The garden area offers a small glimpse of wilderness to residents of the many flats nearby, including those soaring above you in Trellick Tower, the most prominent landmark in the area. It is a design by Erno Goldfinger with heroic aspirations, and introduced European visions of housing to a city perhaps not wholly sympathetic to them. On the opposite side of the canal interesting modern blocks of flats with their own moorings has replaced run-down industrial premises.

(The towpath leads on to Paddington, Regents Park, Islington and eventually the Thames – but with an early chance to return to the tube by turning right at the top of the steps at the first bridge – to Westbourne Park Tube Station – Hammersmith and City Line – in Great Western Road about 150m away to your right from that point.)

The Walk however goes through the wildlife garden and passes the base of the Tower through a local shopping centre (bus 23) over a railway bridge into Golborne Road. The shopping centre and market activity here may tempt the walker to linger and experience the cosmopolitan vitality of the place. If not or after doing so then turning left into St Ervan's Road leads through an area of comprehensive and humane recent residential development to the second example of a twentieth century interpretation of a garden square. Straight ahead a long footbridge over the railway links to Tavistock Road and thence leftwards to Westbourne Park Station.

Going to the right along the far side of the garden area, though not obviously a through route, does lead tortuously through to join Portobello Road at Portobello Green where the market activity is especially intensive and partly within a striking tented structure. Vigorous walkers may choose to go southwards under the bridges here, especially on days when the market is at its most active. This brings you enjoyably to Notting Hill Gate after about three quarters of a mile.

Alternatively go through or beyond the tent and follow the path along the edge of Westway towering above, and you will come out into Ladbroke Grove (buses 7, 23, 52, 70 and 302). The entrance to the tube station (Hammersmith and City Line) is con-

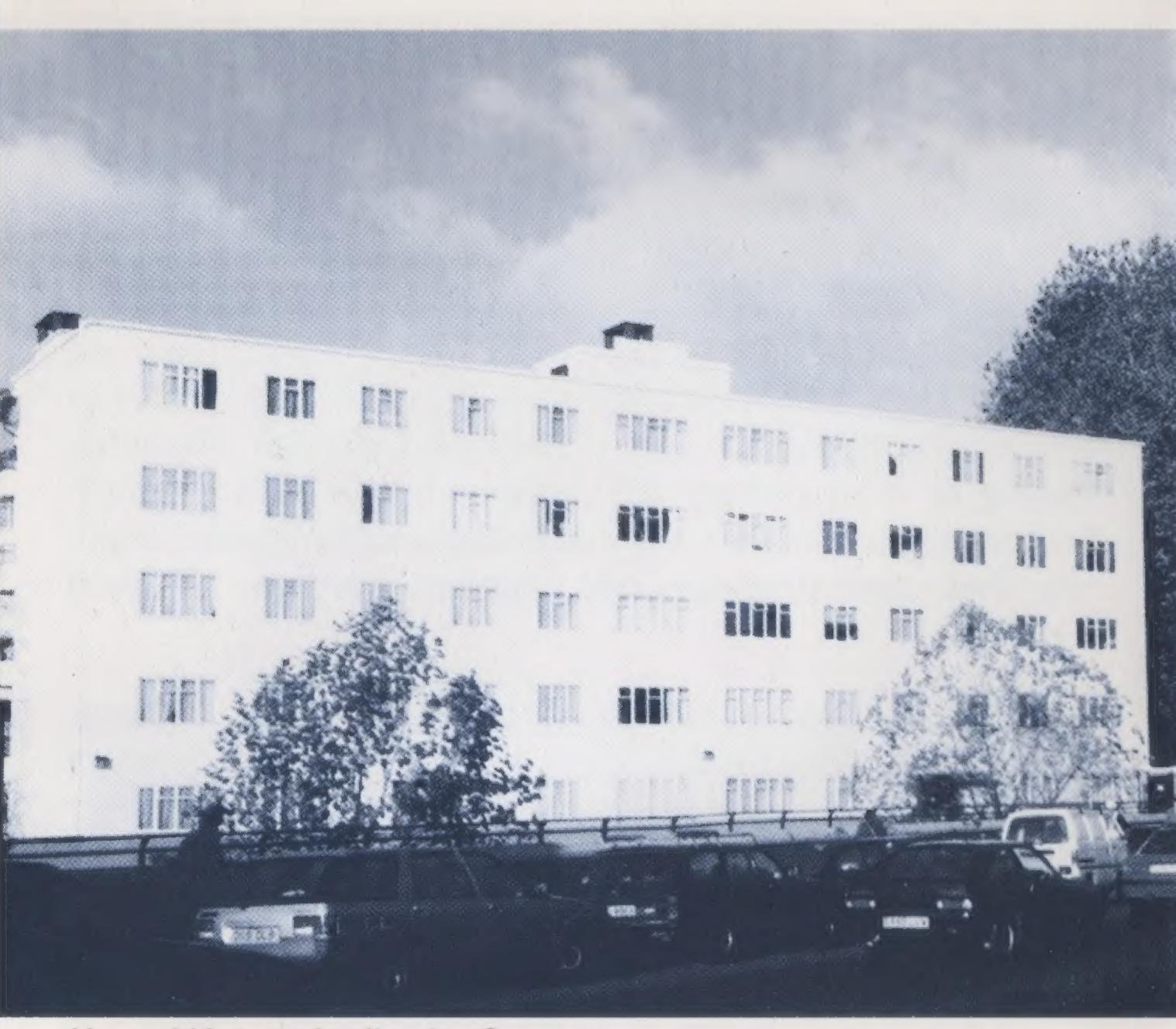
veniently close to your left on the opposite side of the road.

The North Kensington Walk

These notes propose a Walk to explore the northern part of the Royal Borough, whose diversity, interest and vitality is perhaps less well known than that of the centre and the south. It is a walk which passes a very wide spectrum of twentieth century housing types and introduces the visitor to some newly made garden squares and open spaces, and to one which though a little older is of special architectural or historic interest. Tube stations are chosen as the starting and finishing points, but as bus routes are also noted and shown on the map it is quite simple to start or finish at other points on the circuit.

Bus Routes

- Russell Square, British Museum, Oxford Circus, Marble Arch, Paddington, East Acton. Extended Sundays to Acton, Kew (no service early morning or evening Acton–Kew).
- 18 King's Cross, Euston (Monday–Fridays except evenings), Baker Street Station, Harrow Road, Wembley, Sudbury.
- Westbourne Park (Mondays–Saturdays), Ladbroke Grove, Paddington, Marble Arch, Oxford Circus, Piccadilly Circus, Trafalgar Square, Aldwych. Extended Mondays–Fridays to St. Paul's, Bank, Liverpool Street Station.
- 28 Wandsworth, Fulham, Kensington High Street, Notting Hill Gate, Kilburn, Golders Green.
- 31 Chelsea, Earl's Court, Kensington High Street, Notting Hill Gate, Kilburn, Swiss Cottage, Camden Town.
- Victoria, Knightsbridge, Kensington, Notting Hill Gate, Ladbroke Grove, Willesden.
- 70 South Kensington (except evenings), Kensington, Notting Hill Gate, Bayswater, Westbourne Grove, Ladbroke Grove, Acton (Mondays–Saturdays).
- 295 Ladbroke Grove, Shepherd's Bush, Hammersmith, Fulham, Wandsworth Bridge, Clapham Junction.
- 302 Notting Hill Gate, Ladbroke Grove, Willesden, Kingsbury, Mill Hill.



Kensal House, Ladbroke Grove

Starting from Latimer Road Tube Station (or bus 295 along that road) use the crossing to get into Shalfleet Drive opposite and walk away from the traffic. Turn right and pass through the edge of Wayneflete Square, one of the newest and most northerly of the Royal Borough's garden squares. Then go to one side of Charlotte Mews, a quite conventional terrace, and to the left of Dixon House which though conventional in its day (not so long ago) is not currently favoured as a pattern for developing housing.

Here is the edge of an area where the construction of Westway disrupted the established pattern of development and threatened to leave blighted pockets of land below it. Imaginative endeavours by the North Kensington Amenity Trust however have largely healed that urban rupture and the walk goes into a planted public open space and around various recreational facilities including a running track, a climbing wall, an indoor tennis building and an all-weather pitch.

Bear slightly left and find your way under the highest part of the elevated road above to the northern section of Latimer Road. A public house on the corner will confirm that you are on the right track. There is a cluster of modern commercial buildings of eyecatching designs on the other side of the road facing you.

Turn right into Oxford Gardens and then immediately left to walk up Highlever Road, an attractive and quiet tree-lined street. The Edwardian two-storey terraces are given a splendid character with their bays and window details, and mostly have colourful front gardens.

Though our route does not follow it, in due course Highlever Road comes to a tree-lined and colourfully planted incidental open space in the centre of the junction of three roads. Low walls offer an opportunity to rest a while, and to the left there are shops and refreshments in the picturesquely named North Pole Road (buses 7 and 70).

Better to take the second turning on the right, Kingsbridge Road. Before doing so turn around and look back to appreciate the unusual spectacle of Westway and its traffic seen over the rooftops of Oxford Gardens.

From Kingsbridge Road turn left into Wallingford Avenue and then right into the busier Quintin Avenue. These streets bring you past examples of most types of dwelling which give the St Quintin's Estate its appealing character. The Royal Borough have designated it part of a Conservation Area, and aim to preserve and enhance its character and appearance.

Where five roads meet at a roundabout turn left. This is St Mark's Road, and on the left a residential redevelopment (designed by Jeremy Dixon) is an example of a skilled architect seeking to design modern buildings which complement their surroundings without copying dead styles.

Further up St Mark's Road rather grander blocks, of even more recent construction, are similarly successful at renewing the area without harm to its character. They face over the Kensington Memorial Park, a well-used centre of outdoor recreation, but also containing a colourful and sheltered flower garden with seats – potentially a temptation to deviate and pause a while.

It has to be admitted that upon turning right at the end of the road one comes into Barlby Road at a point where the surroundings are less attractive than experienced so far (bus 70). The little cluster of terraced houses seen as you cross the pedestrian crossing has a garden enclosure in front of them which could be much more attractive than is currently the case.

The next terrace, of much larger scale, is the oldest housing you have passed so far and then you come into Ladbroke Grove where you should turn left and cross the bridge over the railway.

KENSAL HOUSE

Note on your left the neat parallel blocks of flats called Kensal House. Their design, by Maxwell Fry and Grey Wornum, was both progressive and sensitive, in the mainstream of the modern movement. The construction is of reinforced concrete and uniform metal-framed casement windows: ornament has been avoided, but much care given to achieving well-arranged and convenient dwellings with ample sunlight and daylight. A day nursery was provided as an integral part of the scheme. They date from 1936–8 and are, as having been listed Grade II*, recognised as being among the 10% of buildings of most special architectural or historic interest in the country.

You can either

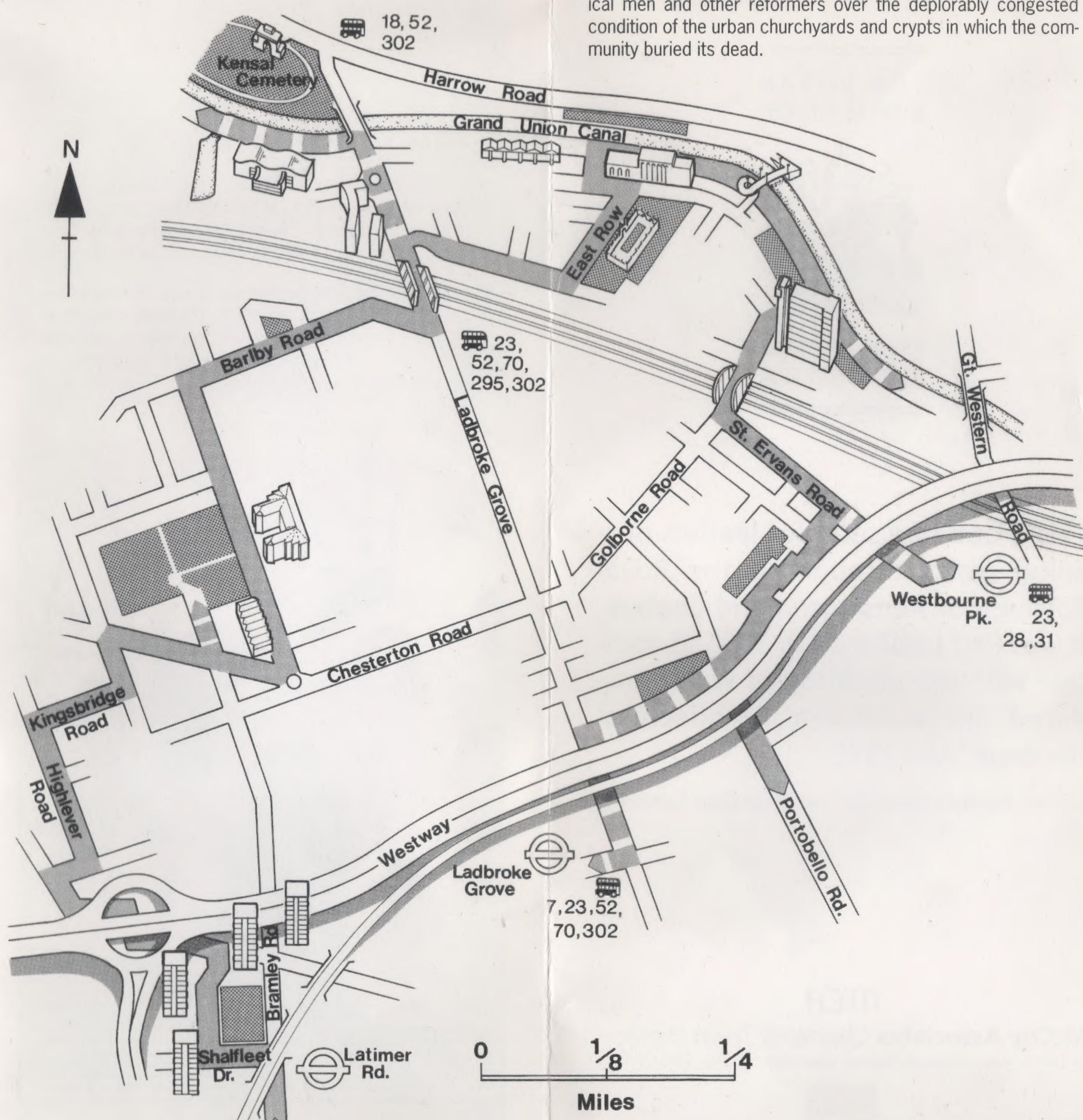
get away from heavy traffic and explore Kensal Town by crossing to the far side of Ladbroke Grove and walking to your left, watching for a flight of steps burrowing down through the buildings. Go down and walk straight ahead along Southern Row past the cluster of modern workshops on your left.

Walking on past a diversity of buildings very different from most of Kensington take the third left turn into East Row. This runs up one side of the community's main open space, and before going very far along East Row you will find on your right the walls and shelters of the Emslie Horniman Pleasance. This garden is, in design terms, one of the the Royal Borough's most important open spaces and indeed the structures are listed as of special architectural or historic interest. It was laid out circa 1911, to designs by C F A Voysey, funded philanthropically by a prominent tea importer.

Having explored this continue to the end of East Row where an imposing big red-brick block prevents you realising that you are almost at the Grand Union Canal. Go in either direction and soon you can turn up unto its towpath. If you go to the left you can see an adventurous design by the architect John Outriam and going up the adjacent cul-de-sac you will experience the odd sensation of finding that the water of the Canal is at a higher level than you are. Upon joining the towpath turn right to follow the Walk or get to Harrow Road, or left to return to the buses of Ladbroke Grove.

Or as an alternative

to exploring Kensal Town, walk on up Ladbroke Grove and it brings you to two very special oases of calm, the Grand Union Canal and beyond that the residual magnificence of Kensal Green Cemetery which was laid out when Kensal was open countryside. The establishment of a cemetery here was the long overdue response to more than a century of agitation by medical men and other reformers over the deplorably congested condition of the urban churchyards and crypts in which the community buried its dead.



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This is one of a series of leaflets outlining walks throughout the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. It was first published in 1996 to coincide with the updating of walks produced for European Architectural Heritage Year 1975.

Cover: The Grand Union Canal near Kensal Green Cemetery

MFCA

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